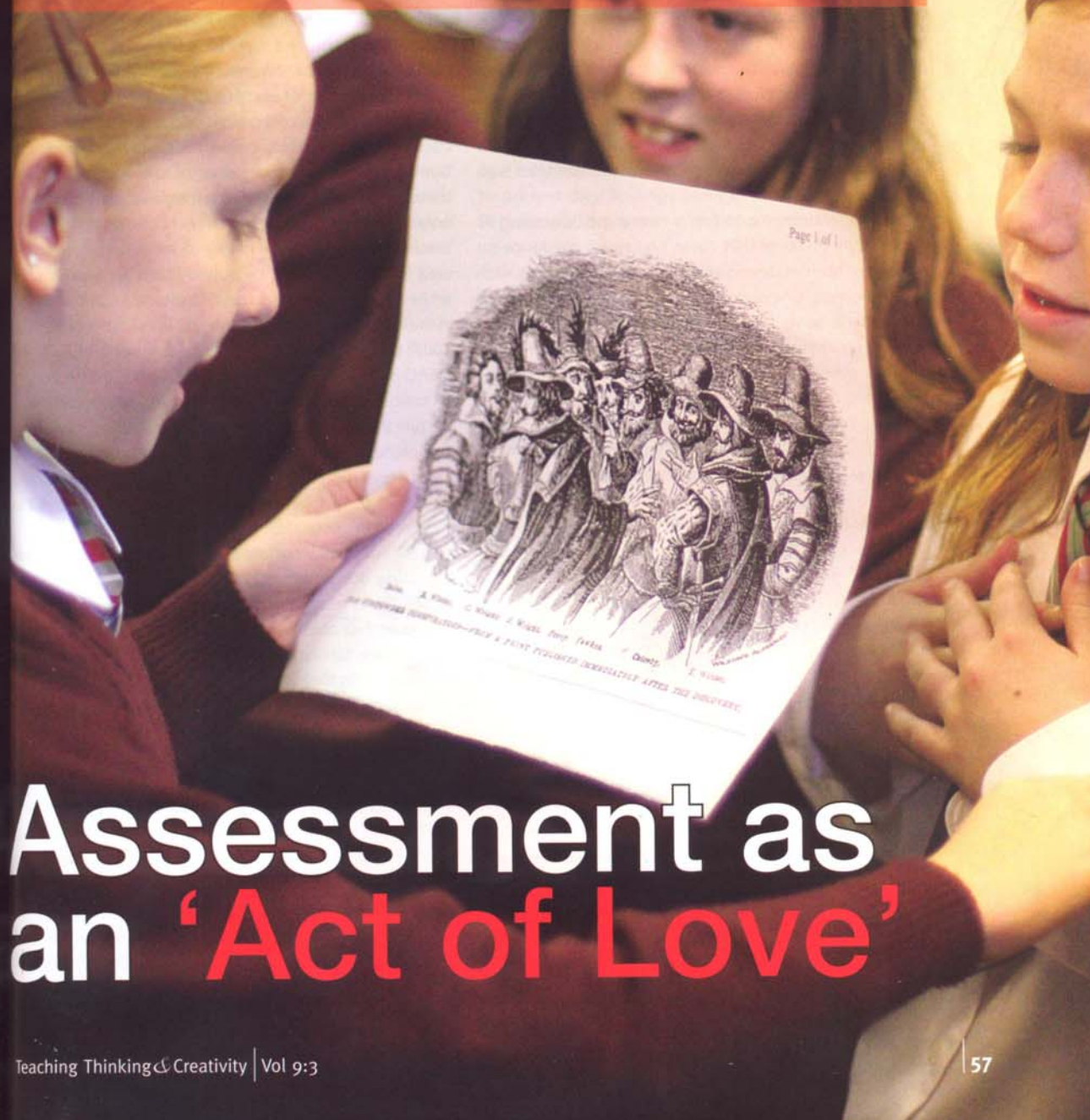


Our system is not geared up to measuring creativity, thinking, confidence and imagination. It simply is not possible to use existing assessment tools to chart children's progress in achievements which are seemingly intangible but which are more important than the frequently 'tested' goals. Debra Kidd reports on Kingstone School - a school of creativity - which is trying to establish a new assessment paradigm.



# Assessment as an 'Act of Love'



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"We are seeking to transform the child's experience in school and create a curriculum and assessment process that genuinely nurtures human development and enables young people to come to terms with who they are and how they relate to others."

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Matthew Milburn, Headteacher, Kingstone School, Barnsley

The journey of Kingstone School, Barnsley, in developing its Cultural Studies programme for year 7 and a Curriculum for Confidence in year 8 has already been documented in this and in other publications. For the benefit of readers who are not familiar with the school, there is a summary of the curriculum model at the end. During the past couple of years, the school has become very much occupied with the prickly issue of assessment.

The school has piloted a formative assessment model in an attempt to develop a process which is fit for the purpose of a curriculum seeking to develop and assess 'creativity, collaboration, confidence, caring attitudes and critical and constructive thinking' in its pupils. It's a form of assessment which holds dear the principles that it should act in the interests of the child and to be meaningful is an 'act of love'.

When a school seeks to find a new way of assessing its pupils, they discover that there isn't much guidance on assessing 'human development', 'coming to terms with self and others' or even on some of the other skills which frequently crop up in 'ideal citizen of the future' rhetoric, such as creativity, compassion and entrepreneurialism. There is even less guidance on assessing happiness, or measuring the importance of love in creating a child who is secure and confident in his or her achievements. There is much talk of a 'love of learning' but little on loving a child. As a nation we seem to find the very concepts of happiness and love inappropriate for a classroom context, and yet these are the principles upon which the Greeks developed their concept of education and on which many European schools of thought such as that of Reggio Emelio are based.

There are, however, several models for assessing 'creativity' – an equally difficult thing to measure, but one which is slightly less embarrassing. One such model, CLA (Collegiate Learning Assessment), was documented in Issue 25 of 'Teaching Thinking and Creativity' and there are several others, including the Creative Partnerships Creativity Wheel and the 5x5 project. To an extent, these seem to have been successful in allowing teachers to observe, document and recognise creativity, but as Mathew Milburn says:

"Why are we spending so much time and money trying to measure or assess creativity (and in the very act, reducing it to a series of tick boxes), when what we really should be doing is looking at finding a creative way to assess pupils?"

It is this creative method of assessment, that the school is trialling at the moment. But first they had to ask three

key questions:

1. What are we assessing?
2. How can we best gather the evidence to assess it?
3. Who are we doing it for?

They seem obvious questions, but actually, in the education system, there is a tendency to measure only what we can measure and this is not always what we actually value. The values of our policy makers are evident in many recent documents and there is clearly an ideological focus in education policy towards developing the whole child – it sits at the heart of Every Child Matters. There is a much greater recognition of the need to develop holistic skills in children, including thinking skills and creative competencies, but there is little information as to how one might assess these skills. In fact in pursuing a testing system which focuses only on the core skills, the government creates a paradox for teachers and it is human nature to focus resources on the area for which you will be publicly held accountable. So while it is clear in both the new Key Stage 3 curriculum and in the Interim Report of the Primary Curriculum Review (Rose, 2008) that the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) are considered to be hugely important in designing a curriculum to suit the needs of a modern society, and despite the fact that these have been combined into a fairly comprehensive set of Personal Learning and Thinking Skills objectives (QCA 2005), too many schools are at best paying lip service to them. As one headteacher who preferred to remain anonymous said:

"If 50% of my kids are jailed for knife crime, no-one comes breathing down my neck, but if that 50% don't get five GCSEs, I'm in trouble. What am I going to focus on? Their grades or their consciences?"

Kingstone School believes both are possible. Since they began training their staff in creative pedagogies, their five A-C GCSE profile has risen by 22% - from 40% to 62% and this is predicted to rise further. This is quite remarkable in a school with 20% of its population on free school meals and 18% with a statement of special educational needs. Furthermore, independent research by the local authority and by Dr Elaine Millard suggests that the school is successfully developing the thinking skills and creativity they hoped for in producing their new KS3 curriculum models in 2005:

"The use of more active learning methods and a focus on the student's own emotional experiences helps boys in particular to make connections to the world outside the classroom and become more involved."



While she mentions the boys in particular, Elaine Millard is at pains to point out that 'girls and boys are equally clear about the benefits of the work they were doing'. The difference is that in her experience, girls seem to be more able to access the 'soft' skills being encouraged in Cultural Studies, regardless of the pedagogy. However, the active learning methods employed in the classroom allowed the boys to enter a level playing field. This was also reflected in assessment.

In asking the questions 'what are we assessing?' and 'how shall we measure them?', the staff returned to the aims of the curriculum. They explored Claxton's five Rs (Claxton 2005):

- resourcefulness
- resilience
- remembering
- reflectiveness
- responsiveness

They examined the Personal, Learning and Thinking Skills (PLTS) framework (QCA 2006). They pored over SEAL documentation (DCSF 2007) and they came up with a tick boxed pro forma (fig 1). If it stood alone, it would simply be another tick box proforma. But it does not stand alone. It is situated within a complex relational assessment process in which the child, his or her peers, parents, teachers and

representatives from the local community come together to explore what has been learned, how it has been learned, what has been gained, valued, developed, failed, explored, investigated, loved, hated and retained.

The child keeps an ongoing record of his or her work throughout the year and this is formatively assessed by staff according to levels of thinking and understanding (see fig 2). The student also keeps an ongoing learning journal in the form of a workbook or blog. Over the year, a portfolio is gathered from which they will select his or her 'showcase' pieces.

In the final half term of the year, the child is set a research project as part of the summative assessment process and is asked to look back over all the work they have done in the year and to use this 'knowledge and understanding', plus any other material they can gather independently, to engage in a philosophical question. Some examples from 2008 were:

- 'Is the world a fair place?'
- 'What lessons can we learn from the past?'
- 'What makes people unhappy?'
- 'Will there always be rich and poor?'

The child selects a question and in 1500 words is asked to present their findings using at least five case studies. For example, one pupil, in responding to the question 'Is



Fig 1.

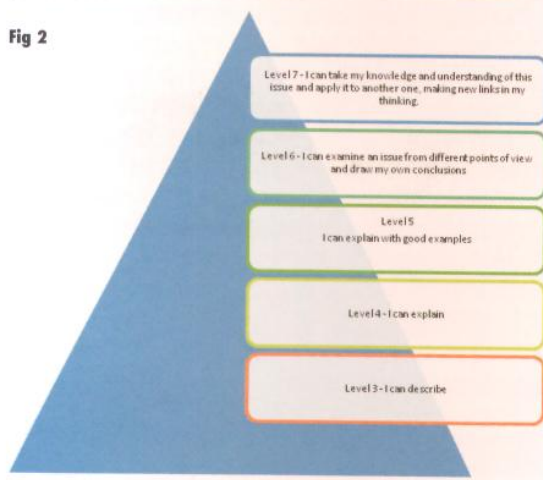
Area	Skills	Description of Skills	Key: A – Always True T – Usually True S – Sometimes True N – Never True	Comment Write a brief comment on your overall performance in each area.
Problem Solving	Exploring and Questioning	I can ask questions and predict answers to them. I can find out information without being asked to.		
	Evaluating Evidence	I can sort information into useful/not useful. I order my information in order of importance and give reasons.		
	Being Objective	I look at more than one side of an argument and explore all sides equally.		
	Reaching Conclusions	I can draw conclusions to original questions using my evidence and my own ideas.		
Making Friends and Working In Teams	Taking responsibility	I have taken a lead in running a project or enterprise. I have discussed roles and responsibilities. I have completed what was agreed and reviewed my work.		
	Building on Team Strengths	I am able to listen to other people's points of view and to build on their ideas. I use positive body language, expressions and gestures to encourage others to speak.		
	Managing the Team	I am able to set deadlines and targets and stick to them. I am able to help others to monitor theirs too so that we meet our deadlines as a team.		
	Evaluating the Team	We discuss what worked and what didn't and we learn from our mistakes so that we can improve in the future.		
Managing Oneself and others	Be organised	I use a planner to keep a record of deadlines and progress. I can plan my time effectively.		
	Seeing things through	I don't panic when things go wrong, but try to find solutions to the problem. I never give up but keep trying new ways to achieve my aims.		
	Managing Risk	I'm not afraid to try new things, but I do my best to analyse where things might go wrong and to put actions in place to reduce the risk.		
	Managing Feelings and Emotions	I can disagree with someone without losing my temper. I try to see their point of view even when I don't agree with it.		
Motivation	Collaboration	I listen well and encourage everyone in the group to take part in the discussion.		
	Finding Solutions	I can break a large problem up into little sections which make it easier to work with.		
	Being Persuasive	I can persuade people without shouting or dominating. I can use evidence and examples to persuade others.		
	Getting Involved	I get involved. I don't complain and although I question, I remain positive and committed.		
Creative Thinking	Imagination	I have lots of ideas and am unafraid to try them out.		
	Making Links	I can show how my ideas link to the topic and find new ways of linking them to other topics.		
	Questioning	I don't accept just what I read or am told, but look for bias and draw my own conclusions.		
	Being Curious	I am interested in the world and people and this makes me keen to learn more.		
	Challenging Myself	I'm not afraid of getting things wrong; I know that I can learn from my mistakes.		
	Invite Feedback	I welcome feedback from others, including my peers and take their comments on board to improve my work.		
	Share Learning	I am happy to share my work and to help others to succeed.		



the world a fair place?' explored the political situation in Burma, the issue of Child Labour, Immigration Policies, the Poverty Gap and Justice in different countries in an attempt to gather evidence for an answer. The process is done entirely at home, but is supported by a log which is checked by staff and parents on a weekly basis and pupils are encouraged to discuss the questions with others, including parents and other adults. The research project is handed in and assessed by a member of staff (see Fig 2) who does not give it a mark but comments on:

- Quality of discussion
- Use of evidence and examples
- Ability to draw conclusions
- Highlights
- Areas for improvement
- Care and presentation
- Quality of research

Fig 2



The child is asked to then prepare a 10 minute presentation on 'What I Have Learned in Cultural Studies This Year?'. They are encouraged to use ICT facilities to support their work. In the presentation they offer five examples of a time where they have:

- Solved a problem
- Worked as part of a team
- Managed their own learning
- Demonstrated creative and reflective thinking
- Shown motivation and perseverance

The evidence of these instances are stored on the Virtual Learning Environment in their Personal Assessment file to be drawn on by the teachers if needed.

The child presents their work to a panel incorporating a significant adult of their choosing (usually a parent), a teacher, a school visitor and two peers – one of whom is their 'critical friend' and the other who is a 'constructive friend'. In preparation for the meeting, the critical and constructive friends have been assessing the pupil and

they feed this back to the pupil after the presentation, in front of the other adults. Each has a proforma on which they have recorded their findings under the same five headings listed above. The child has also completed a self assessment sheet using the same criteria. The three sheets, the presentation and project feedback form the basis for the discussion in which targets are set. Once this is completed, the peer assessors and school visitor leave and the child, parent and teacher discuss the experience.

It is a hugely complex and time consuming process and very difficult to manage in terms of timetabling. Is it worth it?

Well, every child in the pilot managed to complete the task regardless of their ability and all found it a valuable experience, if difficult. Parents were initially sceptical and shocked at the amount of work being demanded of the child – some complained that it was harder than GCSE – but in feedback afterwards they felt that it had been a rewarding experience for the children and many commented that it had initiated lots of conversation and debate at home about the questions being explored. There were many surprised comments such as:

"I had no idea she was capable of this."

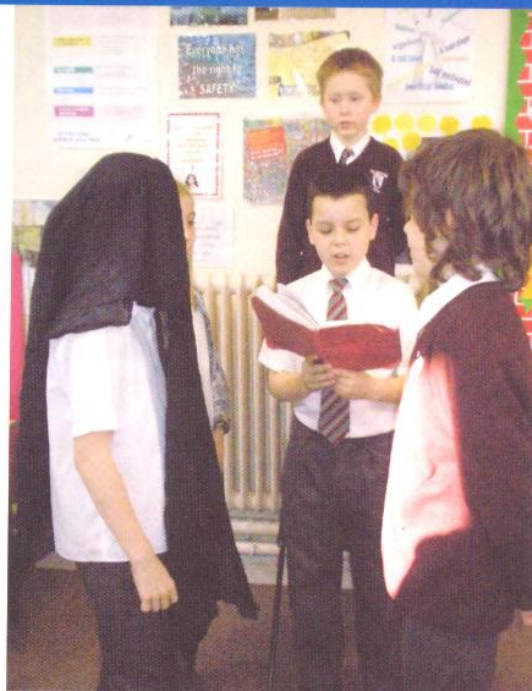
Interestingly many of the students' comments were similar:

"When it were set I thought I'll never do this – it's too hard, but then I did it and I were really proud of myself."

The peer assessment process was perhaps one of the most profoundly significant elements of the process: the pupils were skilfully prepared by staff in order to give feedback and they showed sensitivity and insight which seemed to have impacted greatly on those being assessed. Consider the following exchange:

**Teacher:** So how do you think Jordan has performed in terms of making friends and working in teams?

**Critical Friend:** Well, it's quite hard to say this, but it's not just me who thinks it, but you mess around a lot and its





hard to concentrate when you're in our group because you distract everyone and that gets annoying.

Jordan's shoulders slump. He looks down.

**Constructive Friend:** That's true, but I've been trying to work out why you're like that and I think that you don't have a lot of confidence.

In your work like, so you mess about instead so people won't know. But you should have confidence, because you have some good ideas and you can be funny.

**Critical Friend:** Yeah you can.

**Constructive Friend:** And so we think, don't we, that you should try to have more confidence and trust us to listen to your ideas because then you'll see that you can work well and you'll be better in a group.

Jordan sits up straighter. His head comes up. He smiles.

Once the critical and constructive friends leave, Jordan discusses with the teacher and his parent what he might improve. He has more ideas and is more enthusiastic than before.

None of the children are leaving with a 'level' or a percentage or a mark, but every child and every parent knows what they have done well, what they learned, what they know, and what they need to do in order to improve. Most importantly, they have overcome a hurdle, completed a task that seemed daunting at first. They have faced their peers and their own critical selves and have done so in front of the people that matter the most to them: their parents.

As an external observer of this process, I had many doubts.

I still maintain that it is logistically very difficult indeed, but if I had any doubts as to the value of this approach, they were destroyed in the final moments of every filmed presentation. As the teacher walks to the camera to switch it off, in every case, there is an interaction between child and parent, in which the parent leans forward and pats, hugs, kisses or tousles the hair of the child, mouthing silently comments such as 'well done'. And the child sits with pink cheeks and a silent smile full of pride,

basking in the knowledge that they are loved, valued and admired. Measure that.

The title of this piece comes from a famous quotation, that meaningful assessment is an 'Act of Love' (Rinaldi 2006)

### More to come

#### Cultural Studies at Kingstone School

Cultural Studies is offered as a subject to year 7 pupils and consists of RE, geography, history, PHSE, citizenship, drama, ICT, music and dance with some elements of Literacy. Each half term unit consists of a topic through which all the above subjects are delivered through creative pedagogies including Drama in Education and Mantle of the Expert. Topics include Child Labour, The Holocaust, Natural Disasters, British Identity and so on. Each class has 15 hours across a fortnight and is taught by one or two teachers who will be specialists in one of the above subjects. The model is intended to bridge the gap between primary and secondary school and to develop skills of autonomy, collaboration, creativity, empathy and thinking which are embodied in the five Cs of the Cultural Studies Learning Contract:

- I commit
- I collaborate
- I consider and am considerate
- I communicate
- I create





Following on from Cultural Studies in Year 7, pupils move onto a Curriculum for Confidence in Year 8 in which they study a range of social, emotional and personal skills within Dramatic contexts which cover their RE, Drama and PHSE curriculum time. Again, gains in pupil engagement, confidence and oracy are clear in the research undertaken by Dr Elaine Millard. In 2008, the school began to plan for a new programme for Year 9 in which Science, Maths and Technology will be taught together within a Mantle of the Expert Frame (see [www.mantleoftheexpert.com](http://www.mantleoftheexpert.com)). Working with Luke Abbot as a creative partner, the three departments are developing an integrated curriculum which creates fictional enterprises through which the students acquire a practical knowledge of all three subjects in addition to the business and communication skills required to run an enterprise. For those interested in finding out more, the school is holding a conference on July 2nd 2009.



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